

## The Eight 'C's' of a Winning Team

By JIM LARRANAGA

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*"Winning is a habit"*

- Vince Lombardi

There are certain attributes a team must have in order to be successful. At George Mason we emphasize these qualities every day.

### Building Success



Darron Cummings, AP

Jim Larranaga has translated his principles of success into an NCAA Final Four berth and more career and single-season wins than any coach in George Mason history.

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We want our players to understand and appreciate what each person brings to our program and why we recruited him. It is not always the most talented team that wins. In fact, physical talent is only one of many ingredients that help a team succeed. That is why we look for the 8 C's in recruiting to build a program that wins consistently:

#### **1. Character**

You win with good people. We search for student-athletes who come from good families who set high standards and value a college education. We want players who are intelligent, hard working and humble. We have players from both single-parent households and ones where mom and dad are both at home. In both cases, the parents instilled in their son a sense of pride. They taught him the importance of being highly disciplined and motivated. We believe these qualities help you become a winner.

## **2. Competitiveness**

You must be mentally tough. Learning to compete at the highest level requires a great effort every day. Real talent demands persistence. Your teammates must be able to count on you when the going gets tough. We believe in the old adage, "Winners never quit." So we look for players from winning programs. Currently on our George Mason team we have many players who contributed greatly to championship teams in high school. Senior Gabe Norwood guided his high school team to the Pennsylvania state championship. Folarin Campbell led his Springbrook High School team to the Maryland state finals. Will Thomas, our go-to guy on the inside, captained his team to the Baltimore City Championship and Louis Birdsong powered his St. Joe's team to a 38-1 record and a Top-10 national ranking in the USA TODAY high school poll. We recruit winners who have learned from great coaches.

## **3. Competence**

You must have skills. In order to build a team you must recruit players who compliment each other. We want good balance in our offense and to achieve good balance we want great outside shooting with strong post play. Height is not a major consideration for us. Most of our inside post players are undersized but can score against taller players.

## **4. Consistency**

You must perform daily. One of the most underrated qualities a player can possess is consistency. When recruiting, it's easy to fall in love with someone with great physical talent. We see great talent every night on SportsCenter. Players who can dunk are impressive but only if you can count on them to do it consistently. The most difficult player to coach is the one who shows you great potential one day and lacks the motivation to give the effort day in and day out.

## **5. Cohesiveness**

You must work together. Some people refer to this as "chemistry." Players must learn to play smart, play hard and play together. No individual, no matter how talented, is more important than the team. Team goals should always come before individual accomplishments.

## **6. Commitment**

You must make an unconditional commitment to the team. Sacrifices have to be made. Not everyone can be a star or even a starter. Your team must have individuals who will bust their tail every day in practice even though they might not get much playing time. An unconditional commitment means you will do your best and give everything you have no matter what your role. That is easier said than done. We value greatly those players who sit the bench and cheer for their teammates.

## **7. Communication**

You must listen to each other. Coaches always want to teach their players what to do and we expect them to always listen. But one of the most important communication skills a coach can have is listening to your players. We practice what Dr. Steven Covey says in his book “The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People” which is ‘seek first to understand and then to be understood.’ Your players must know you care about them and their feelings. Listening to them sends that message loud and clear. Last but most important is -

## **8. Confidence**

You must believe in yourself and your team. When it comes right down to it, the team that wins is the one that believes it will win before the game even begins. We have embraced these eight qualities. With them, we have become the winningest program in the CAA over the last eight years and are one of only nine programs in the country that has won 10 or more regular season conference games for eight consecutive seasons. Winning is a habit.